New Westminster Schools

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March 30, 2021

Dear students, parents, caregivers and staff,

As you likely heard yesterday, the Provincial Health Officer has updated the recommendations around mask use in schools ... to add another layer to the protections that are built into the comprehensive health and safety plans that are keeping our schools safer.

It may take a few days to update the public health guidance documents. However, we're anticipating they will specify that:

1. **Staff, adults and visitors must wear a mask or face covering when inside a school building.**
2. **All students in grades 4 through 12 must wear a mask or face covering when inside a school building.**
3. **It is strongly encouraged for all kindergarten through grade 3 students to wear masks when inside a building as well.**

We also anticipate the exceptions will mirror what we've already seen throughout the year, and what was introduced in Surrey this weekend. That includes:

- Masks can be removed when consuming food or beverages.
- Masks may be removed while communicating with a person who has a hearing impairment.
- Teachers or other educational staff may temporarily remove masks when providing direction or instruction, when they are a minimum of two metres away from others.
- Someone may be asked to temporarily remove their face covering for the purposes of identifying who is wearing it.
- Masks or face coverings may be unable to be worn by:
    - A person who can not put on or remove their own mask without assistance.
    - Someone with a psychological, cognitive or physical impairment, or specific health condition.

Our District and school health and safety plans will soon be updated to reflect the changed guidelines.

Over the next few days, as we await confirmation and final language, we'll transition staff and students into the newly updated and anticipated guidelines. **The updated and confirmed new guidelines will come into full effect in New Westminster Schools on Tuesday April 6th, when students return after the long weekend.**

For younger students who may not be used to wearing masks indoors, we suggest you send your child to school this week in a clean mask. Schools will have disposable masks available if students forget theirs.

Alongside the amended mask rules in schools, additional orders and measures that affect community interaction were announced yesterday. You can find the updated health orders here: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/info/restrictions

We were also exceptionally happy to recently see the vital front-line work our staff are doing, be recognized by government, in announcing that they will be prioritizing vaccinations for those working in our schools. We're awaiting further information from Fraser Health to determine what that will look like, and will be connecting with our staff about that soon.

As always, if you have questions about the current health orders or about other related issues, you can contact the Fraser Health COVID-19 Call Centre at: 604.918.7532.

Sincerely,

Karim Hachlaf
Superintendent of Schools / CEO